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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE TO KRG ON PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

REF: STATE 23276

This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

11. (SBU) At march 7 meeting with KRG Interior Minister Karim Sinjari, Regional Coordinator Yellin per reftel made the following points re Palestinian refugees:

-- The Palestinian refugee population in Iraq has been singled out for persecution by armed, violent elements in Iraqi society.

-- They had been granted asylum in Iraq by previous Iraqi governments and remain entitled to the protection of the Iraqi state.

-- Under current conditions this may not be possible, and neighboring states are not willing to accept Palestinians who seek asylum out of Iraq.

-- UNHCR is willing to try to resettle Palestinian refugees outside the region.

-- Processing can not be accomplished in the insecure environment of Baghdad today. To even try might actually increase the threat to the Palestinians.

-- The U.S. therefore requests that Palestinians now residing in Baghdad be given temporary asylum in the Kurdish Region.

-- Given Kurdish security concerns, a controlled camp situation would be acceptable, provided UNHCR is provided access. If that were established, UNHCR would then initiate a program to screen Palestinians for resettlement outside the region.

14. (SBU) In response, Sinjari:

-- Expressed both sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian refugees and the KRG's desire to help, recalling that the Kurds had been refugees themselves.

-- Pointed out that the KRG had accepted ten of thousands Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and that more would certainly follow. This influx had already stretched the KRG's resources in many ways.

-- Indicated his personal view that accepting the refugees would involve a serious security risk for the KRG.

-- Observed that a camp situation would not ameliorate his concerns about terrorism. Camp residents would want to work in the community and "we will not be able to control them."

-- Said he had been approached by UNHCR with this request two months ago and that he had declined it.

15. (SBU) Sinjari said that In light of our formal demarche, he would approach the KRG Council in Ministers and provide us with the

KRG's coordinated response.

16. (SBU) Comment: While Sinjari agreed to consider information that might allay the KRG's concerns over security, his implied answer was clearly no. This will be a tough sell in the KRG. Given this negative answer from the KRG, whose agreement is necessary, post has not raised the issue with the GOI in Baghdad.

Speckhard